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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTIONS: THE YOUTH VOTE - GROWING
NUMBERS BUT UNLIKELY TO SUBSTANTIALLY AFFECT THE RESULTS

REF: Tegucigalpa 2346 and previous

1. Summary: Although the Honduran population consists of a disproportionately large number of people under the age of 25, youth play a minimal role in the November 27 general elections. Since as a group they are the least likely to vote, it is doubtful that they will significantly alter the course of the elections. Those that do plan to vote show a slight preference for the National Party and are motivated largely by the same issues that motivate the country as a whole: security, especially gangs, and the economy. If the youth of Honduras were to become unified and vote based on similar ideals, they would yield great political power. While they may not form a strong political voting block now, issues involving children and youth are important issues to older voters and are central to the campaigns of both of the major candidates. End Summary.

2. According to the Honduran National Institute for Statistics, roughly 65 percent of the population of Honduras is less than 25 years old. This phenomenon is due in part to an exodus to the United States of a large percentage of able working age adults (upwards of one million Hondurans live in the U.S.). This generational imbalance has led to a strong focus on the political issues involving youth and a focus on protecting the future potential of Hondurans. However, despite the older generation's interest in issues pertaining to youths, there are varying degrees to which the younger generations are involved directly in issues that directly affect them.

3. Some youth view the upcoming election as an historical time in which there is potential for a new generation to usher in a fresh era of Honduran politics. The Political Section met November 11 with roughly 50 Honduran private university students of various academic and political backgrounds to discuss issues pertaining to Honduras and youth politics. While this group is not necessarily representative of the youth population as a whole, the meeting provided an interesting insight into some of the general thoughts of this generation.

4. Many youth believe that this election will prove to be an historic day; that this election holds the potential to motivate the youth of Honduras to take political action. However, the negative campaigns that both major parties used have left some younger voters cold. Others said that they felt they could not vote against the party that their family supported, and may therefore refrain from voting at all. However, the biggest factor in deterring young voters from becoming more politically active is the perceived corruption within the voting system. Many are convinced that some sort of fraud or deceit will take place during the election. Believing that their vote will play little role, many insist that voting is a waste of time. While the political involvement of many of the wealthier and more educated youth is more likely, it is doubtful that the national turnout of young voters will be high.

5. When the youth do plan to vote, they have a slight preference to vote for the National Party over the Liberal Party. Several polls have indicated that young voters favor National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo, while senior voters favor Liberal Party candidate Manuel "Mel" Zelaya. However, the polls do not predict that this difference is large enough to create a significant impact in the election results. There seems to be no definitive reason why Lobo is more popular among younger voters, other than perhaps his strong anti-gang stance.

6. The general perception among youth is that, like much of the country, that if they vote, their vote will be due to deep family ties and not personal beliefs. As with many other demographic groups in Honduras, age seems to be a less of a predictor than family party affiliation. Students were taken aback in the November 11 meeting when asked what issues they took into consideration when voting, with many explaining that they did not view youth as a united voting block. Even those who had developed views independent from their families reported feeling compelled to vote in accordance with their parents' wishes.

17. Despite limited youth involvement directly in politics, issues involving youth are central to all of the parties' campaigns. Each of the presidential candidates, as well as several prominent congressional candidates and many mayoral candidates, signed the Pact for Childhood, Adolescence, and Youth. This pact made the candidates promise to pursue various goals benefiting the youth of Honduras and promising that the government will protect children's rights. While many of the articles in the pact require vague promises rather than specific actions, the fact that all major candidates signed this pact shows the perceived importance of youth issues. Looking at how these issues affect voters, many older voters are swayed by issues which affect their children, and women, who are registered in significantly higher numbers than men, appear especially likely to care about the welfare of the children and youth of Honduras.

18. Comment. Sheer numbers alone suggest that the younger generations have the opportunity to engage with the political system and truly take control of the government's direction. However, it seems that for now this potential will largely remain unrealized and that youth will continue to play a minimal role in Honduran national politics. There still exists, however, interest in youth issues and the potential for politicians to institute reforms that are based around such concerns. However, events like the signing of the Pact for Childhood, Adolescence, and Youth seem more likely to be campaign promises than genuine commitments to implement policies benefiting youth. End Comment.

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